

**NIE 57-1-75**

**Prospects for Cambodia Through  
August 1975**

**13 February 1975**

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# NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

## Prospects for Cambodia Through August 1975



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PROSPECTS FOR CAMBODIA  
THROUGH AUGUST 1975

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The Central Intelligence Agency, the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, and Treasury, and the National Security Agency.

**Concurring:**

The Deputy Director of Central Intelligence representing the Central Intelligence Agency

The Director of Intelligence and Research representing the Department of State

The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency

The Director, National Security Agency

The Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator for National Security, Energy Research and Development Administration

The Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury representing the Department of the Treasury

**Abstaining:**

The Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation

**Also Participating:**

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

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## PROSPECTS FOR CAMBODIA THROUGH AUGUST 1975

### PRÉCIS

The military situation in Cambodia is critical.

- The Khmer Communists (KC) have embarked on an ambitious dry season campaign aimed at closing the Mekong River.
- They have severely curtailed the flow of supplies reaching Phnom Penh via the Mekong. At this point, there is a 3 to 14 day supply of critical munitions items in the Phnom Penh area.
- In conjunction with this interdiction effort, the KC are keeping pressure on Phnom Penh in an effort to prevent the Cambodian Army (FANK) from reinforcing the Mekong front.
- For the first time, the Cambodian Government's (GKR) faces the threat of collapse from economic factors because food stocks will cover consumption only through mid-March if convoys do not make it up the Mekong.

The KC will be unable to interdict the Mekong continuously, but delays and shipping losses will continue to be such that the "heavy" airlift now scheduled—600 tons per day—will be required to supply the GKR minimum ammunition needs for at least the next few weeks.

- The Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of State believe that this heavy airlift will be required until the rainy season widens the Mekong in July or August.

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- The Defense Intelligence Agency and the intelligence representatives of the US Army, Navy and Air Force regard this judgment as overly pessimistic. They believe that the GKR will order extraordinary measures to regain security along the Mekong and that some essential convoys will get through. Thus, they believe that a heavy airlift need not be as prolonged as the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of State expect.<sup>1</sup>
- In either case, the risks to aircraft and crews will be substantial since Pochentong airport would become even more of a priority target for the KC.

Aside from this immediate supply problem, the GKR's ability to get through the whole of the dry season ending in August depends on its receipt of supplemental US military and economic aid.

- If no additional aid is forthcoming, the military situation will deteriorate rapidly, starting in late March or early April at the latest. The economic situation will also steadily worsen. In such a situation, pressures against the GKR for a settlement, even on KC terms, could become overwhelming.
- If the GKR receives additional aid in this fiscal year, it should be able to get through to the end of the dry season. But this situation would offer little prospect of the GKR regaining the overall initiative and would allow the KC to further consolidate their control over most of the country.
- War-weariness is widespread in Cambodia and increasing numbers of Cambodians are coming to the belief that there is no relief in sight.
- The chances for a breakthrough on the negotiations front are poor. Although they currently lack the ability to bring Phnom Penh down by a frontal assault, the KC appear to have the incentive, tenacity, and external support to continue the war indefinitely.

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of the Treasury believes that the estimate is not sufficiently clear regarding the prospects for delivery of economic aid supplies up the Mekong in the event the necessary funding is provided.

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## DISCUSSION

### I. THE MILITARY DIMENSION

1. *The Current Situation.* The military situation in Cambodia is critical. The KC have severely curtailed the flow of supplies reaching Phnom Penh via the Mekong River. GKR stocks of ammunition, food, and fuel are fast approaching the point where, without additional supplies, FANK's ability to resist the KC will further deteriorate. KC forces along the Mekong are well-entrenched along the major choke-point areas, and the KC are now using mines against convoys attempting to transit the river. Unless FANK can clear the banks of the Mekong and cope with KC mines, it is doubtful that supply convoys will be able to use the Mekong on more than an occasional basis.

2. Elsewhere, fighting around Phnom Penh is below the level of early January, but the KC are clearly trying to step up their pressure on the capital, including Pochentong airport. Thus far, fighting around government-held provincial enclaves has been limited, allowing FANK to divert units to the Mekong corridor and to Phnom Penh. With major insurgent units likewise concentrated along the Mekong and around the capital, military activity in the countryside has remained at moderate levels.

3. *The KC Dry Season Offensive.* The KC on January 1 launched the initial phase of their dry season offensive with widespread attacks around Phnom Penh and along the lower Mekong. Out of a total KC force of 60,000 to 70,000 combat troops, some 25,000 insurgents participated in the attacks around the capital and another 10,000 were committed to the effort against the Mekong. FANK on the whole reacted well to the renewed pressure on Phnom Penh and has contained the KC in most areas around the capital. The KC, nevertheless, maintain footholds near Phnom Penh, and the city proper as well as outlying facilities—including Pochentong airport—remain targets of KC shellings. Both sides have suffered heavy casualties in the fighting: FANK lost over 8,000 troops during January and KC losses are believed to be nearly twice as high.

4. The situation along the Mekong is more serious, and no resupply convoys have attempted to move up the river from South Vietnam since early February. With the exception of the government navy base at Neak Luong and a few isolated beachheads along the lower reaches of the river, the KC now control virtually all key riverside terrain from a point 15 miles southeast of Phnom Penh to the South Vietnamese border. In addition to concentrating their firepower along the river, the KC have also mined the shipping channel south

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of Neak Luong.<sup>2</sup> As a result, only three small re-supply convoys have reached Phnom Penh since the beginning of the year, and they took heavy losses while delivering only a two-weeks' supply of rice and ammunition to the capital. A fourth convoy attempted the run upriver on February 3, but it turned back to South Vietnam after losing several craft, some to mines. A major effort will be made to bring a convoy upriver later this month. The increasing reluctance of civilian crews and ship owners to risk the voyage, coupled with the continued deterioration of the ground situation along the river, make it extremely doubtful, however, that significant quantities of supplies will reach Phnom Penh via the Mekong before next month at the earliest.

5. *KC Strategy and Capabilities.* At this point in the dry season, the primary KC objective is clearly to close the Mekong and thereby strangle the GKR. The large-scale KC attacks against Phnom Penh's outer defenses and increased KC pressure against GKR provincial enclaves are at the moment adjuncts to the Mekong effort and are designed to keep FANK fully occupied and unable to reinforce the Mekong front. These attacks complement the pinch on the Mekong by forcing FANK to cut heavily into its dwindling ammunition stocks and, by generating additional refugees, further strain declining GKR economic resources.

6. In implementing the initial phase of their campaign, the KC have shown a significantly improved ability to coordinate large-scale military action on widely separated fronts. This is largely the result of an increased number of KC headquarters elements above the battalion level. In the process of strengthening their upper echelons, however, the KC have stretched thin their limited number of competent battlefield commanders. As the fighting wears on and again takes its toll of KC cadre, command and control problems are likely to crop up again, especially at the lower levels of the KC organization.

7. The KC military forces lack the heavy artillery, armor, and logistics system of a conventional army, but are well-equipped with small arms,

<sup>2</sup> We lack detailed information on the type or quantity of mines now in KC hands, but those currently being used along the lower Mekong were probably obtained from North Vietnam or China and may be fairly sophisticated.

mortars, recoilless rifles, and rockets.<sup>3</sup> KC units have a clear edge in aggressiveness and cross-country mobility and usually come out on top when pitted against thinly stretched FANK forces defending lengthy lines of communication or outlying territory. The KC, however, have repeatedly come up short in large-scale attacks against the perimeters of Phnom Penh and provincial centers where FANK can bring its superior firepower and its naval and air assets to bear. FANK entered the new fighting season with a continued 2 to 1 numerical edge over its opponent. FANK's use of its US-supplied artillery, air, and naval assets also showed continued improvement.

8. Information on the KC's external sources of supply is limited, although there is a steady flow of supplies from KC warehouses in the northeast to battlefronts elsewhere in the country. We do know that KC "defense minister" Khieu Samphan this spring signed an apparently open-ended military aid agreement with Peking and that the KC this fall renewed an arrangement with Hanoi whereby North Vietnamese logistics units deliver materiel to northeastern Cambodia in exchange for KC rice. These developments are in line with Sihanouk's private and public claims that the Chinese provide the KC all their arms and that North Vietnam fulfills its responsibilities merely by transporting the munitions south.

9. Even if their present stocks are adequate—and the heavy insurgent ammunition expenditures during the opening round of the dry season indicate they are—the KC may begin encountering supply problems as the fighting wears on. Last year, KC forces in some areas had to economize their ammunition during late spring as the result of overly heavy expenditures during the early months of the dry season.

10. *The Next Few Months.* How hard the GKR tries to solve the Mekong problem will depend

<sup>3</sup> Over the years the KC have captured a number of 105mm howitzers from FANK. These have been used infrequently, however, and with little effect, the one exception being the artillery attacks against Phnom Penh last spring. Chinese-manufactured 107mm rockets are the most extensively used heavy weapons in the KC arsenal. As for the KC logistics system, trucks provided by the KC's allies and river craft transport material from entry points in the northeast to areas near battlefronts in other parts of the country. Under combat conditions, however, KC troops carry their ammunition with them and are resupplied by porters. Unlike FANK, which has made extensive use of the M-113 armored personnel carrier, the KC have no armor whatsoever.

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in part on its perception of US support. Our judgment is that the KC will be unable to interdict the Mekong continuously, but delays and shipping losses will continue to be such that a heavy airlift (600 tons per day) will be required to supply the GKR's minimum ammunition needs, at least for the next few weeks (see Table). Heavier use of Pochentong airport will complicate Khmer air force operations and require additional facilities, equipment, and personnel. Moreover, Pochentong would become even more of a priority target for the KC. The risks to aircraft and aircrews will be substantial.

GKR STOCKS AS OF 13 FEBRUARY 1975

	Metric Tons	Days Supply	Consumption Rate*
Rice .....	18,000	33	545
POL .....	12,600	30	420
Ammunition .....	7,305	13	544

\*Metric tons per day.

MEKONG DELIVERY CONVOYS

	1 January- 13 February 1974 (metric tons)	1 January- 13 February 1975 (metric tons)
Rice .....	35,600	6,750
POL .....	21,500	5,300
Ammunition .....	12,700	6,000
TOTAL .....	69,800	18,050

11. The Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of State believe that the FANK will be unable to reopen the Mekong for long enough periods to allow a reduction in the 600-ton per day airlift before the rainy season widens the Mekong in July or August. The Defense Intelligence Agency and the intelligence representatives of the US Army, Navy, and Air Force regard this judgment as overly pessimistic. They believe that the GKR will order extraordinary measures to regain security along the Mekong. The FANK has the capability to provide requisite convoy security, but it is problematical whether it will be effective in time for the next convoy. Beyond this, the odds are that the GKR will get some essential convoys through to Phnom Penh. The heavy airlift need not, therefore, be as prolonged as the CIA and State expect. DIA and the Services believe that FANK determination can

be better measured when the next convoy starts up the Mekong in a week or so.<sup>4</sup>

12. *The Aid Factor.* Aside from the immediate supply problem, any judgment that FANK will be able to continue resisting the KC through the whole of this year's campaign season—i.e., through August—must be predicated on the GKR's continued receipt of US military aid. The \$275 million in military aid allocated for FY 1975 has already been spent. Assuming an average ammunition expenditure of nearly 500 short tons per day, ammunition stocks already in Cambodia and in the pipeline will only last until late March or early April at the latest. With the implementation of ammunition conservation measures FANK could stretch available stocks, but its ability to do so is dependent on a reduced level of combat which cannot now be assumed. If the fighting continues at its present levels and the US is unable to provide supplemental military aid, FANK would probably find itself unable to contest the Mekong and be forced into a last-ditch stand around Phnom Penh before FY 1976 funds become available. If, on the other hand, FANK receives sufficient aid to bridge the gap between April and the end of FY 1975, it should be able to get through to the end of the dry season.

## II. THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

13. *The Impact of US Economic Aid Cuts.* The GKR's economic fortunes continued their downward spiral throughout 1974. Government spending remained far ahead of domestic revenues and an enormous trade deficit again had to be met almost entirely by foreign assistance. Although imports were shifted heavily toward basic commodities—primarily rice and fuel—reduced agricultural production and wartime disruptions in the transportation system resulted in continued supply shortages both in Phnom Penh and provincial enclaves. These shortages and the budget deficit fueled a 250 percent increase in the cost of living for the second consecutive year, which again impacted most severely on the increasingly large number of refugees generated by the fighting.

<sup>4</sup> The Department of the Treasury believes that the estimate is not sufficiently clear regarding the prospects for delivery of economic aid supplies up the Mekong in the event the necessary funding is provided.

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14. The situation can only get worse under the recently imposed ceiling on US financed imports into Cambodia during FY 1975. The \$177 million limit<sup>5</sup> is almost 40 percent below the amount of US economic aid appropriated in FY 1974 and about 30 percent less than what is considered necessary to assure adequate midyear food stocks and to prevent further declines in industrial production. Under these restrictions, rice stocks in August are likely to approach near record lows—even if the Mekong remains open—and this will come at a time when US supplies for further deliveries are relatively scarce. For the next several weeks, the pressures on Phnom Penh food stocks will be somewhat less severe because local crops have matured and are now being marketed in government areas.<sup>6</sup> This will provide scant relief, however, should the Mekong remain closed for sustained periods; even at new lower rationing levels, there are only enough government-held stocks on hand to meet food needs through mid-March. The situation could deteriorate even more rapidly with further large-scale refugee inflows<sup>7</sup> or an outbreak of commodity speculation.

15. Other critical supplies have also been affected by the aid cutback. As a result of both the present ceiling and high world oil prices, petroleum deliveries are 25 to 30 percent below FY 1974 levels. So far, stiff domestic price increases, rationing, and widespread electrical blackouts have kept civilian fuel consumption down. A similar decline in imports of industrial raw materials and semi-manufactured goods, however, has caused numerous factories in Phnom Penh to close down and those remaining open have cut back production. Decisions to lay off employees have already prompted some demonstrations by workers, and labor unrest

<sup>5</sup> Included in this amount are \$100 million for economic and humanitarian assistance and \$77 million for PL-480. The GKR expects to receive an additional \$15 to \$20 million in economic aid from multinational organizations and other Free World countries.

<sup>6</sup> To slow down the drain on rice supplies while the Mekong is threatened, the GKR has been supplying provincial enclaves from well-stocked warehouses at the isolated southwestern seaport of Kompong Som. Rice is now being rationed to civilian consumers in Phnom Penh.

<sup>7</sup> The current round of fighting has already raised the capital's refugee population by 40,000 to an estimated 1.2-1.3 million.

will almost certainly increase as more plants cease production.

16. *GKR Options.* The GKR is limited in what it can do to cope with reduced US economic assistance. To compensate for the sizable loss in GKR income which derives from the sale of aid goods, the GKR could either dampen public spending or circulate large amounts of new money. The latter would only fuel further inflation, however, while the former would mean reducing the salaries of already hard-pressed civil servants and military personnel. Rice consumption cannot be reduced significantly as most Cambodians are now at subsistence levels. The GKR can ask for increased aid from countries such as Thailand and Japan, but these donors are unlikely to provide aid on the scale necessary in light of US aid cutbacks.

17. *In sum*, the GKR is facing the serious threat of collapse from economic factors. As stocks of essential commodities inevitably decline, the GKR will have to take drastic steps, including frequent closings of government rice distribution centers, and further sharp cutbacks in petroleum consumption. Such measures would stretch available aid, but they would bring on massive unemployment, skyrocketing prices, widespread hoarding, and possibly demonstrations against the government.

### III. THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL DIMENSION

18. With US advice and past levels of aid, the GKR has been able to maintain enough stability to keep matters from coming unstuck on the domestic political front. Nonetheless, the war and its associated hardships have taken a toll. War-weariness is widespread and increasing numbers of Cambodians are coming to the belief that there is no relief in sight. Some senior GKR leaders themselves appear to be losing confidence in the government's ability to survive. In a recent conversation with Ambassador Dean, for example, Sirik Matak stressed the need to bring the war to an end this year, citing the waning support in the US Congress for Indochina. If supplemental US assistance is not forthcoming, the military and economic situations will deteriorate rapidly. In this case, sentiment against the Lon Nol government will inevitably increase. Elements in Phnom Penh might try to force the departure of GKR figures high on the KC's list of "traitors" in hopes that this would open

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the way for a settlement short of complete capitulation. The KC, however, would probably only read such a step as a sign of imminent internal collapse and push even harder for total victory.

19. Receipt of enough supplemental aid to keep its head above water economically and militarily would enable the GKR to maintain the political equilibrium. The GKR's victory at the UN last fall has increased Prime Minister Long Boret's stature, and he continues to enjoy good relations with President Lon Nol. The alliance between the two, Boret's strong US backing, and his improved relations with senior FANK generals have effectively torpedoed the efforts of Lon Nol's controversial brother Lon Non to gain a position of influence. Similarly, a continuation of cautious and accommodating policy toward student, teacher, and labor elements in the capital should minimize the potential for public unrest so long as economic problems grow no worse.

20. At the same time, prospects for any significant improvement in government performance remain dim. Despite constant prodding from the US Mission and Long Boret's genuine efforts at reform, the GKR bureaucracy is still as inefficient as ever. A prime example is the GKR's inability, despite available manpower, to fill combat units, many of which are at 50 percent strength or less.

#### IV. SETTLEMENT PROSPECTS

21. The poor prospects for a genuine compromise settlement reflect the fundamental weaknesses of Phnom Penh's position and a growing awareness among its opponents that the GKR probably cannot survive an indefinite prolongation of the war. Although the GKR realizes that the Communists would hold a strong hand in a negotiating process, it nevertheless appears to have come to the conclusion that its interests lie in a political solution sooner rather than later. Lon Nol this summer issued a call for peace talks which for the first time posed no preconditions. In the wake of the UN General Assembly's endorsement of a negotiated settlement, the GKR has been actively encouraging foreign mediators to help spark a dialogue.

22. The GKR's weaknesses and its growing interest in a settlement, however, only reinforce the KC's tough position on negotiations. The Com-

munists still appear convinced that time is on their side, that the level of US assistance to the GKR will continue to decline, and that the morale and internal cohesion of the GKR will eventually reach the breaking point. During the summer and fall the KC embarked on an extensive effort to improve economic conditions in their zone, a step the Chinese in particular appear to have encouraged strongly. To line up foreign support for these efforts, the Communists in October dispatched an "economic and financial" delegation—the first of its kind—to Peking, Hanoi, and Pyongyang. In short, the KC are conveying the clear impression that they are prepared, if necessary, to sustain the insurgency over the longer haul, and will continue to strengthen their forces and political apparatus, while awaiting a total GKR military collapse or, perhaps more likely, a GKR surrender under the guise of a "negotiated settlement."

23. *Sihanouk's* interests, like those of the GKR, rest in an early political solution to the conflict. Because of his relative flexibility and accessibility he has been a natural target for foreign peace initiatives. The hard-line strategy of his nominal KC allies, however, continues to keep the Prince frustrated by his inability to directly influence events in Cambodia. As the war has dragged on, Sihanouk, in fact, has suffered a progressive loss of authority—a trend most recently dramatized by the formal transfer of most portfolios in his "government" to in-country KC figures. Sihanouk, on occasion, continues to go to the media in an apparent effort to encourage foreign mediation and greater KC flexibility. In a recent interview with Swedish newsmen, the Prince for the first time publicly expressed willingness to accept elements of the present GKR within an "expanded government." Sihanouk's comments amounted to a fairly direct advocacy of a Lao-style coalition as the basis for a settlement—an arrangement he could hope to dominate because of his stature among the Khmer peasantry, his undeniable political skills, and his international backing. But the KC's distrust and animosity toward Sihanouk coupled with his diminishing influence among the insurgents would pose serious obstacles to his gaining the upper hand in any coalition arrangement.

24. *Peking* and *Hanoi*, through their bankrolling of the insurgent military effort, possess the leverage

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that could force or encourage the KC to soften their position. Without Chinese and North Vietnamese support, the KC would be forced to reconsider their position. But to date, Peking and Hanoi probably have seen little to gain and far more to lose by applying or threatening to apply these ultimate sanctions. To a great extent, longer-term Chinese and North Vietnamese interests in Cambodia are rooted in a mutual but competitive desire to maximize their own influence within the Cambodian Communist movement. As long as the KC are determined to press for complete victory and have credible hope of achieving it, they will probably remain the beneficiary of this Sino-Vietnamese rivalry.

25. It will be in *Peking's* interest to maintain an influence over the course of any possible negotiations so as to limit a future Soviet position in Cambodia and to offset North Vietnamese influence. Sihanouk could be a useful agent in this process, and Peking probably desires that he play an important role in a post-settlement government. The Chinese, however, would not wish to alienate the KC at a time when insurgent military activity is on the upswing. Peking thus has hedged its bets by strengthening its ties with the KC while continuing low-keyed support for Sihanouk. As a result, Chinese equities appear to be well protected whether the conflict is settled on the battlefield or at the negotiating table.

26. For *Hanoi*, the Cambodian situation represents a more difficult problem, complicated by the strategic relationship of events in Cambodia and Communist objectives in South Vietnam and by Hanoi's relatively direct but not always harmonious links with the KC. Short-term North Vietnamese interests are not necessarily tied to a complete Communist takeover in Cambodia. In fact, Hanoi

might come to see some merit in an eventual negotiation of a Lao-style coalition in Phnom Penh that could be used to step up the pressure on Saigon to accept a similar arrangement in South Vietnam.

27. At present, however, we see no sign that Hanoi is interested in a quick end to the Cambodian impasse or that it is now prepared to play a leading role in bringing about Cambodian negotiations. Hanoi's most immediate objective probably continues to be to ensure that no regime in Phnom Penh is strong or aggressive enough to threaten Vietnamese Communist freedom of movement in eastern Cambodia. Given the friction and occasional open conflict between the Khmer and Vietnamese Communists, Hanoi probably continues to rest easiest when KC attention is focused on the military struggle with the GKR and KC dependence on materiel delivered by North Vietnam is most acutely felt. More fundamentally, the North Vietnamese probably see little reason to promote peace in Cambodia at a time when they clearly sense growing US Congressional disenchantment with the American role in Indochina. By keeping the pressure on in Cambodia as well as in South Vietnam, Hanoi may hope to encourage this trend, reasoning that it would lead to a growing erosion in Saigon's political confidence and military effectiveness.

28. *In sum*, the chances for a breakthrough on the negotiations front are poor. The KC appear to have sufficient incentive, tenacity and external support to push the war indefinitely. If US supplemental assistance is forthcoming, the most likely result will be the continued survival of the GKR in Phnom Penh and its provincial enclaves through this dry season. But this situation would offer little prospect of the GKR regaining the overall initiative and would allow the KC to further consolidate their control over most of the country.

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